

THE ROME (NY) SENTINEL

Editorial

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Look ahead for energy relief

With gasoline over \$3 a gallon, it's time for Congress to respond to the American public's need for relief by taking a far-reaching and intense look at our country's energy policy.

That means: Discard old ideas and encourage new ways of thinking.

Conservation and high technology will be key ingredients in future energy solutions. That's also the belief of Rep. Sherwood L. Boehlert, chair of the House Science Committee, who this week was critical of Democratic leadership for offering little and of Republicans for reviving worn-out suggestions like drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

It's unfortunate that last month when the Department of Transportation announced the new Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) rule for light trucks that DOT didn't include a higher mileage target. As Boehlert has pointed out, better mileage is possible.

One high point in the DOT provision is the new rule that extends the CAFE program to sport utility vehicles (SUVs) that weigh between 8,500 and 10,000 pounds — all vehicles of that weight were previously exempt from CAFE requirements.

There are other things Congress can look at to save imported oil.

The U.S. can reduce its demand by requiring automakers to use technology that already exists to improve fuel economy — technology that the automakers refuse to bring into the market despite societal demand. "That is a classic market failure that the government ought to address," Boehlert said. "The National Academy of Sciences has made clear that mileage can be increased significantly with current technologies and without reducing safety."

In the area of new technologies, a congressional hearing was scheduled Thursday on a proposal to offer prizes that would be incentives to advance hydrogen technology. This is the type of forward-looking program Congress needs.

Bio-fuels and hybrid cars are other areas where we can trim our oil-powered transportation costs.

We agree with the congressman, who has been in the forefront of environmental issues, that the nation needs far-reaching ideas from Congress. The country can't forge an independent energy future by relying on the past.